

CUPID IN SABLES

By Kate Jordan

(Mrs. F. M. Vermilye)

THE little hidden-away street where Dolly had rented a room edged on Washington Square. To be "cheek by jowl" with this aristocratic quadrangle counted for nothing; just the turning of the corner made a gulf between the two. The Square seemed always turning away its head; the little street seemed turning up its nose. The Square had no acquaintance of any sort with the little street; the little street did not care a pin. It was frankly a happy vagabond, boasting of one old furniture-shop, one old book-shop, a delicatessen-shop and a French circulating-library whose windows were bright with *chic*, Parisian posters. All the houses on it were rented piecemeal to poor artists who were happy to fancy that the little street resembled the rue des Saints Pères, and, dreaming of Paris as they leaned from their windows in the vaporous, Spring twilights, they were not interested in, and did not envy, the victorias and broughams they saw pause before the staid, red-brick mansions glittering along the Square.

Dolly came eastward between the green grass-plots one Spring afternoon, four small parcels in her arms. She had been in a dusty, ink-spattered office in Park Row since the morning. Now, tired, happy, shabby, expectant, hungry, without one full dollar in her purse, without a cloud on her soul, her heart singing, her lips smiling, she was hurrying home to the square room on the top floor back of a rakish little house on the little street that did not care a pin.

It was hard to unlock the door with her dinner in her arms, but she succeeded after a little trouble, and stepped in to find the sunset over the clothes-lines transfiguring her room to a pastel in red wash. She took off her hat, and pushed the cheese-cloth curtains at the window further apart, and stood with her face lifted to the light.

She was an unusual type. Seen among a throng, her face was like an orchid among garden flowers. Her charm was a puzzling, irritating quality born of the defects rather than the prettiness, and two people rarely defined it alike. She might please much or little, but she could not be ignored. She was always attentively watched. Her head was as smooth and lustrous as a mouse's coat and of the same pale, nutmeg shade which seemed to melt into lighter tones to supply the *bisque* of her skin; her features were negative in modeling, yet pleasing; her small, deeply curved mouth the palest coral, gray-pink at times, with little flecks of golden down at the corners; long, ash-blond lashes fringed her oddly slanting eyes of the most dreamy, misty, vivid blue. As she looked at the sunset, she smiled a little to one side, the soft, curled lashes veiling her eyes. There was something sphinx-like about the little face. She might have posed for the mystery of woman as she stood so, the splendid red flare bathing her. A sigh came with the thought that it was almost a challenge to misfortune for a human being to be quite as happy as she was, and it was almost appalling to think that in

another hour she would be still happier, if that were possible.

She began to unwrap the packages. From one of the papers, she took a triangle of Port du Salut, from another, a bottle of claret, from another, a head of young, green lettuce, curly and crisp to the point of unreality, as if it had tumbled from an idyllic water-color, from another, a small quantity of mushrooms.

"What a blessing it is to be a born cook," said Dolly, her finger on her lip; "with the creamed oysters, toast and coffee added to these, it will be a birthday dinner such as never was—and, oh, the dear will lecture me deliciously for extravagance."

She got out of her street clothes hurriedly, and into a new gown of pink, sprigged muslin, of nun-like simplicity.

"Oh, Tommy, Tommy Atkins——"

she kept humming, and, catching up a crayon, she began making large capitals on the brown wrapping that held the cheese:

"DINNER AT SEVEN.
EXCELLENT TABLE D'HÔTE.
SURPASSING COFFEE.
NO MUSIC."

She put a large pin through the top of this, and stepped into the hall. This upper space had once been the attic; the stairway came up in the centre, and five doors pierced the square around it. Dolly tiptoed to the one opposite her own. Midway on the panels there was a small, brass plate with a name on it—"Victor Trent." Just above this, she pinned the paper, and was about to knock, preparatory to a speedy flight, when the door was pulled suddenly back, and a man who was coming out stood still. He was young, strongly and gracefully made, his face boyish. His hair was a sleek, lustrous black, his eyes a soft, yet dominant brown. At this moment, he was half-shaven, a razor in one hand, one cheek of pallid smoothness, the other a mass of bubbly, white lather. He wore a loose-belted blouse which hung open, showing his throat, and his ex-

pression was one of blank amazement. They stared for a moment, and then both laughed.

"Of course, you had to open the door and spoil my advertising scheme," Dolly said, edging away.

"Of course," said Victor, "you had to cramp my style by this unexpected and amazing liberty. I meant to be so beautiful to-night—but you'll never forget this mug."

"May a lady ask if you meant to wander from your own fireside that way?" Dolly asked, her head on the side, as she still backed toward her own door.

"I meant to look from the hall window at the church clock in order to be on time"—he smiled over the soap—"as my watch is still on a visit to Uncle Goldberg. How was I to know that on my very threshold I'd run into a bill-poster?" He tore down the announcement, and glared at it with rolling eyes. "No music?" he snorted, starting back and brandishing the razor. "Ah, heaven, unsay those words. No music—no 'Margarita,' no 'Under the Bamboo Tree,' no Bill Bailey asked to come home, no 'Hiawatha'—ah, ah, it is too much, too much!" He staggered back with a smothered cry, and shut the door to the sound of Dolly's laughter.

As she was about to reënter her own room, the German janitress called from the foot of the stairs:

"Miss Smith, a letter just come for you alretty mit ten cents to pay. Ach, how some peoples are snide on their letters, ain't it?"

Dolly went down a few steps, and leaned over the banisters.

"I'll give you the pennies in the morning when I pay for the milk;" she smiled, and received the London letter from the pudgy hand.

When she was again in her own room, she took the precaution of locking the door before opening the envelope:

15 HALF MOON STREET,
LONDON.

MY DEAR DOROTHEA:

The small sum you asked for I enclose. Are you sure it is enough? How can you

possibly exist on so little money? Do let me send you on some thousands for an emergency. Dear Dorothea, if you should fall ill! The thought haunts me at night. You may regard my suggestions as superfluous, for, in a way, though your mother's lifelong friend, I am your paid dependent—but really—really—you ought to come home. Your place is here. Your social duties are here. You don't want to be called eccentric—do you? No young woman does. But this mysterious absence in America, this assumed name, this juggling with poverty is—well, really it might be called sensational—such a thing as those awful newspaper women do and then write about. Have you not had enough of the adventure by this time? Hasn't your reckless, impatient mood died a natural death? What can I say more? I am distressed to think of you, a Lanesborough, doing this wild thing, and trust you will return to your own world without delay.

Meanwhile, I assure you I have kept your secret absolutely. Bailey & Pimlo were most reasonable, and did not press me for particulars. As you directed, they will let your income accumulate, awaiting your orders, and as the balance you left in the bank in my name has hardly been touched by you, it would appear that I shall not have to apply to them for money for some time. Your Uncle Benjamin was almost rude to me when I refused to give him your address. He has gone to Homburg, very angry. Oh, my dear Dorothea, what in the world are you doing? Pray don't let your originality or whatever name you have for it, lead you to make a grave mistake. I shall await your next letter with much anxiety.

Faithfully yours,

EMILY OSGOOD.

P. S.—Surely you won't go on the stage.

Dolly fingered the letter, her vaporous, blue eyes looking dreamily into the dusk. She saw London on a foggy day, the sun a copper disk; phantasmal squares; the ghosts of hansoms; she heard smothered sounds as from a world shut in by mist. She saw her home on Half Moon street, a bijou mansion, where fires twinkled and flowers made perfume and color in dusky corners; it was like a padded, scented case for a jewel of great price. In a mental chiaroscuro, she had a vision of herself in lace and pearls at the opera, of her carriage in the Park, the scarlet liveries, the powdered heads, herself weary and exquisite under a rose-colored parasol; she saw the pause at the rail, the chat of the marionettes of fashion, monocled and

listless—the sameness which had become irritation, the surfeit which had become revolt, until the decisive moment rang through her life, and from the men who had knelt in worship of her money, from the boredom of filling every hour with its allotted, dry and scentless pleasure, she had sped away.

That the result was happiness was evident as Dolly, after putting away her letter with its money-order for twenty pounds, prepared her dinner. Her eyes were shining, dauntless, and she laughed as she sang.

"Dear Emily Osgood," she said, aloud, as she stirred the mushrooms, "if you could see me now, you'd really faint. Poor Emily, whom nobody will ever love!"

When all was ready for the dinner, the room showed prettily in the mixture of lingering dusk and unshaded candle-light. Dolly never used the gas. She had bought four plain glass candlesticks; when she had a guest, she lighted candles in the four; when she wrote or read, two were sufficient; when she sat and dreamed, one burned like a star before a plaster bust of Petrarch's "Laura." She was never without a pot of flowers; an outlay of fifty cents kept her window-sill green for months. Her table was of the kitchen variety, painted white. Her bed was a divan with jade-green cotton cover and pillows. A large folding screen, made of Eastern matting painted with brown grasses, hid her dressing-bureau; that it was originally a clothes-horse, covered and painted by herself, did not appear. Her few cups, saucers, and plates were cheap, but of harmonious design and coloring. In fact, the back room, holding nothing that cost much in dollars and cents, was rich in esthetic selection.

Dolly's excursion among the poor had taught her one wonderful thing—that poverty does not necessarily mean ugliness. Those born with a sense of beauty and a desire for it, must have it, and carry it and create it in whatever spot they make their home through the valley of the shadow of

penury. It was this thought that made Victor pause after entering, his hand lingering on the knob.

"Green and white,
Spring and candle-light——"

he murmured, smiling at Dolly, who with her palms flat on the table was nodding at him over a bunch of mignonette.

"Is that your own?" she cried. "Don't stop. More—give me more."

"Sunset's flush
Like a rose's blush——"

He faltered, and added: "Now it's your turn."

"Fill the place," cried Dolly.

"Lacking Dolly's face,
It would be——"

He paused long.

"Well?" she murmured, as he stood with drawn brows, a finger on his lip, "don't stop just there. That's a horrid place to stop."

"It would be——" he repeated, musingly.

"I'm devoured with curiosity," she said, defiantly. "What would it be without Dolly's face? Something not at all nice, I hope?"

Victor sighed, ponderously.

"I'm very sorry, Dolly, for really all I can think of is:

"Bully place for me!"

"Upon my word," Dolly said, lifting her little head, arrogantly.

"I know that's awful, but the Muse has thrown down her bricks; in other words—she's struck—and it's got to go that way:

"Lacking Dolly's face,
It would be
Bully place for me."

"But you don't mean it?" she asked, with insinuating softness.

"Not a bit."

"Then I'll let you have some dinner."

Victor brightened. "I dare say I'll do better after dinner. I'm like Pepys, who says in his diary: 'I'm very cross when I'm empty.'"

He went very close to her and, his face growing serious quickly, looked

down at her. "I'm going to lecture you, Dolly."

"Why?" she asked, her delicate lips smiling, mutinously.

"For spending your hard-earned money. Good heavens, I *see* oysters and I *smell* mushrooms. Are you mad?"

"Oh, I love to be scolded," said Dolly, and added, in a little whisper: "There's claret, too."

"Well, do you know what I call this spread? I call it ostentatious. It's bad taste. It's flaunting your success in my teeth. It tells that penny-dreadful journalism and heart-to-heart talks with fair girl readers about their steady companies pay better than pictures for the funny papers." He thrust his hands in his pockets and frowned tenderly down upon her. "Promise you'll never do it again."

"Not next year, when you're twenty-seven?" she asked, as she took the chair he drew out for her, and began serving the oysters.

He sat down opposite her, and bent over the little table, a passionate question in his eyes.

"Next year! Where will you be then?" His fingers stole across the narrow space till they were very near where her own flickered busily.

"I often think of that," Dolly murmured, color creeping into her cheek and fading quickly, as if a flame had trembled there; "I wonder, too, where you'll be?"

"Wherever you are," he said, with quiet certainty and a long, level gaze.

The words floated about in her brain to a matchless tune. He loved her. She had felt it for months. She was sure of it to-night. She was sure, too, that this was to be the night of nights in her life. He would phrase the passion of his voice, the caress of his eyes. The joy, the wonder of it! What she had sought, she had found. What she had hungered for was to be given to her. Under the ripples of laughter and jest between them, this thought kept rushing over her heart like the still, deep pulse of the sea.

"Now tell me about to-day. How

many sketches have you sold?" Dolly asked, when they had tasted the oysters and pronounced them perfect.

He looked heavily miserable. "The question is painful. The art editors were cold to me to-day," he said, sadly. "In my own room, Dolly, as I drag my pen over cardboard and make lines that become pictures, I have a cozy feeling that Hogarth and I might have been the greatest pals, I feel my work so much like his. When I go out to peddle the stuff, I feel like a homeless cat on a back fence on a wet day."

"Oh, I'm so sorry, Victor! You sold nothing, and yet your work is really good. Are you—are you very unhappy?"

"Not at this moment, with mushrooms in the near perspective," he said with what seemed to her a hard, sad little laugh, while over his boyish face regret settled like a mist.

Love that was both passionate and protective poured from Dolly's eyes upon his bowed, humiliated head and, had he glanced up then, he must have kissed her for it.

"But you are sad sometimes?" she asked, in the littlest, tenderest voice, while putting on his plate some of the largest mushrooms.

Victor nodded sadly, without looking at her. "At night," he said, bitterly, "at dead of night. Oh, the black things come out then and sit around my pillow—and what they say to me of failure, of penury, of renunciation!"

For the first time, Dolly realized fully the vast difference between her poverty masquerade and the real, gnawing fear of the wolf with fangs which is heard nosing the threshold beyond the closed door. Her flesh chilled, a feeling of sickness weighed upon her heart. Wild words trembled on her lips—an offer of assistance, the promise of a future where she could help him develop his talent beyond the gaunt, gray land of Need and Struggle. But she checked herself in time. She could do this for the man who loved her. She could not speak of this to her comrade.

"Good heavens! we're growing mel-

ancholy," Victor cried with his lightest laugh, as he poured some claret into her glass and then into his own. "Ah, Dolly, we mustn't do that. When one's poor, one must cultivate the ideal vagabondage with its laughter in the very teeth of despair. There's always something to be thankful for. Remember that. So, though I have not sold a sketch to-day—nor, indeed, this week—you, my friend, having the lucrative post of Motherly Mazie on the *Young Girls' Needlework Bazaar*, which brings you in twelve dollars per week, are an agreeable thing to contemplate." He lifted his glass. "Here's to Motherly Mazie, long may she advise the young mind on the mysteries of drop-stitch and sentiment, long may she rake in that twelve per."

"Yes," said Dolly, as she sipped and laughed; "I was lucky to get that position. It's so easy. I'll read you a few of the letters I have to answer."

"Do, Mazie, do," said Victor, hilariously; "who knows but that from those pearls of thought I may learn to live a better life?"

The picture Dolly made with the nimbus of candle-light around her sleek, mouse-colored head, her lips curving into amazing nicks and dimples as she read and laughed, her slender throat with a luster upon the flesh showing above the low lace edge of her muslin gown, the glance of her cloudless eyes from the paper to his face, made a supreme invitation to love to which every pulse in Victor's body answered.

"They always send locks of their hair," said Dolly, opening one envelope; "they seem possessed to have you tell them the color of it." She held up a skein of very red hair tied with a pale-blue ribbon.

"I can see her," said Victor; "she thinks blue's her color; she has pink eyelids and splash freckles."

"Now listen to this," cried Dolly, pitching her papers on the table:

"DEAR MOTHERLY MAZIE:

"No doubt you have children of your own, and can advise one who has no mother to go to. I've never loved any one in my life, though I've gone with all sorts of fellows.

There's one that makes me tired, and my sister wants me to marry him. He is all the time sniffing. Do you think I will ever meet a man I can love? Please mention the color of enclosed hair.

"Yours in the depths,
"GLADYS."

"Next," cried Victor. "I've had enough of Gladys."

"One from 'Too Stout' says her face has a square expression though her features are round. She sends hair, too," said Dolly with a sigh. "But here's one I'll really enjoy answering in my best motherly vein. Listen:

"I've been going with a young man for six months. He is a train-despatcher. The other night, at a social, the conversation turned on getting married. A lady-friend of mine says to him—I put her up to it—she says, 'You are a marrying man, Ed.' He says, 'I guess nit. The girl ain't born that can get me into that con game.' I almost fainted. Shall I ask his intentions? Please advise.

"UNHAPPY PEARL."

"Are you going to tell her to ask him?" Victor laughed.

"No," said Dolly, shaking her little head wisely; "Motherly Mazie advises her to trust and wait."

They laughed again. As she put away the mass of papers, Victor watched her with a new seriousness.

"Dolly," he said suddenly, a dreamy, penetrating note in his voice, "isn't it wonderful that we two should be here alone and happy?—so poor, but happy—using our talents to earn bread as if they were shovel and pick, but happy? Don't you feel sorry for all the sad, heavy rich who sit at dull dinners waited upon by formal flunkies?"

"Are they all dull?" she smiled.

"Society is a big, respectable institution. Anything so absolutely respectable is stagnant. I mean that, if one can't give Conventionality a dig in the ribs now and then, and the old Adam in all of us send out a good, primitive yell without shocking the severely frock-coated and the perfectly corseted, it's dull."

"How do you know so much about society?" she asked, leaning on her elbows, an exquisite guilt for her masquerade filling her face with light.

Victor sat back and sighed.

"Yes, how should I know? I, who paint cartoons for five dollars apiece, and sell precious few of them? How should I know of that lush, stupefying content? Ah, my dear Dolly, I have the artistic clairvoyance and eyes that observe. I see it all so plainly. I've quite summed up the situation."

"Tell me."

"The rich, fashionable people who insist on taking life with a *sauce piquante* have to become freakish. The heavily correct call them fast; they are fast in the sense that they run like the wind away from the others. They eat much more than they need, drink ravenously, flirt feverishly with other people's husbands and wives, travel and dress at a tension, sleep little, read nothing, think nothing, do what they're told they mustn't, just because they oughtn't—all to get away from the dullness of ponderous, moneyed respectability. I don't blame them, do you?"

"Not a bit," said Dolly, with real feeling.

"I dare say if you and I were rich we'd have to join the gang which does the *outré* things, just to make life go with a breeze—wouldn't we?"

"I'm sure of it," said Dolly, her eyes sparkling. "At least I know we'd have to 'blaze our own trail' some way or other—if we were so *very* unfortunate as to be rich."

"But we're not rich," said Victor, his voice vibrating; "if we were, we wouldn't be here now, all alone in this little room, just you and I, without the ghost of a chaperon, shut away from the world as completely as if we were in a moated castle with the drawbridge up. Dolly!" He picked his chair up and planted it vigorously by her side. "Isn't it wonderful? isn't it happiness?" He put his hand closely over hers; she felt it burn and tremble. "It is happiness," he persisted, and bent closer. "I love you very much, dear!"

She tried to speak, but only his name faltered from her lips as he put his arms around her. He kissed her with

hunger and tenderness as he murmured:

"Love that keeps all the choir of lives in chime,
Love that is blood within the veins of Time.
Love that is fire within thee and light above
And lives by grace of nothing but of love."

"Oh, Dolly," he whispered, "we know this love. We are as gods. The world can give nothing greater, nothing sweeter than this."

She drew back a little and looked into his eyes.

"Those last words, Victor—'And lives by grace of nothing but of love,' oh, that's the best of all—isn't it? You love *me*, the woman, Dolly Smith, because of nothing material that I have or represent, you love the something that is I—*just I*—these hands, these lips, my touch, my voice. Oh, Victor, that's where the triumph lies for me."

"For both of us," he said, and smiled radiantly; "I have nothing but failure to offer, yet you love me. You are as poor as the little mouse I sometimes liken you to. We are Hunger and Thirst, but, clasped heart to heart, heaven lies about us." He took her hands and kissed each very gently. "God only knows when we can get married. I must 'trust and wait,' dear, too," he murmured with a whimsical little smile. "You will love me well enough to wait for me, Dolly, till I've accomplished what I must?"

Dolly felt stifling. The moment had come for confession. She had had no idea it would be so hard to speak. The Hunger and Thirst picture with heaven about them had the sublime in it, and she was going to pour over the tableau a metallic rain of pounds, shillings and pence. She could be silent a little longer, but it was unnecessary. The act had been played to a superb finish; there was nothing to be done but drop the curtain on it and ring it up on another scene. But she would never forget the poetic pain of her mental farewell to Dolly Smith, Motherly Mazie, Mrs. Schlitzner's top-floor roomer in the little street that did not care a pin.

"Is it so hard, Dolly?" Victor asked, breaking in on her silence, his eyes anxious.

She laughed, happily. "Oh, not that—not that, at all. I could wait for you for a lifetime. But—" she left him and walked to the little desk, returning with something hidden behind her—"there's something you must know, Victor, and I want you to promise that you'll forgive me for my silence."

He stood up, his face very white, a vein she had never seen before throbbing between his brows.

"Forgive you? What do you mean? You make me afraid."

"Say you'll forgive me first," she said, touching his arm with her disengaged hand.

He put it away sternly. "You are already married—you've hidden it—you've let me grow to love you," he stammered, hotly and miserably.

"I'm absolutely free. I've never been married," she broke in, clearly and slowly. "No, it's something quite different. I'll risk your being angry—I'll make you forgive me. This is my confession—" She stood with hands behind her, her head a little lowered, like one confessing a wrong done: "I am not poor. I am awfully, hugely, overwhelmingly rich."

She looked up. He was staring at her with a half-awakened expression.

"Rich?" he asked, in stupefaction.

"I'm one of the big, English heiresses. You've seen poor copies of my photographs in the New-York papers many a time. I'm not a beauty, but because I'm an heiress they insist on saying I am, and at this very hour I'm on sale in Bond-street shops, two shillings apiece, at reduced rates by the dozen." She held out a photograph, saying, piteously: "*Me*."

Victor stared at the picture, which showed her in a riding-habit. Underneath it was printed: "Lady Dolly Lanesborough."

"Titled?" he gasped.

"That, too," she admitted, ruefully; "I'm very sorry."

To her amaze, he fell into a chair,

and burst into reasonless, wild laughter. He stopped suddenly, his face twitching.

"I beg your pardon," he said. "It's like a knock on the head. I think I'm a little hysterical." He dropped his face in his hands, his shoulders heaving. "I never dreamed of such a thing; I never dreamed of this," she heard him murmur.

She knelt beside him and drew his hands from his face. He stared at her with the strangest expression, and again laughed, helplessly.

"Why are you here?" he asked, at length; "it all means something—what?"

"Yes, I'll tell you," said Dolly; "I grew to doubt myself. I grew to believe I could never win a real love. I grew tired seeing men at my feet whom I knew were spending my money in their imagination. To them I was to be a payer of bills—a cheque-book with fingers to write a signature and a heart that didn't count."

Victor listened seriously, attentively.

"But you could and did win love for yourself, surely. You are so sweet."

"That's the tragedy of being conspicuously rich. How can you tell what is true, what is false? No, sweet as I am," she smiled, "I believe the golden frame I was set in was so splendid it outrivaled me. Men wooed the frame while lying to me. Once I thought—only a year and a half ago—that an unreckoning, poetic passion was really given me, and I was almost won." Her face was now hot with disdain; "I found out the truth. He had written to a woman—a woman he should have married—that he still loved her, but that his creditors were about to crush him and nothing could save him but a rich marriage. The woman brought the letter to me." She stood up and flung out her arms. "I made up my mind to take a new identity, breathe a new air. I determined to know the real Dolly Lanesborough. I would have time to study her, get into her soul. I would be able to learn her value as a woman, not as

a money-bag. So, I left London secretly. My companion alone knows where I am and something of my experiment. To the rest, I am vaguely traveling. I've only used my own money, and that sparingly, when I was really at lowest ebb before I got the position on the *Bazaar*, for it was not part of my programme to starve. Oh," she said, putting her hands on his shoulders, "it has been as refreshing to my soul as the wind over the Scotch moors has been to my body, jaded after the rack of a London season. You see I have the *wanderlust* in me, the streak of the vagabond, for far back in my family there was a *mésalliance*—a gipsy grandmother who, tradition says, used to steal away now and then from her castle and her stately friends, and go up on the mountain-top, where she'd walk barefoot, roll in the grass, and scream like a savage till the wild mood was past." She bent over him with a cooing kiss. "This was really my screaming and my bare feet. Oh, Victor, this life, where I've met you, has been re-creative. I am happy for the first time."

He met her gaze with a strange, confused expression and sat mute.

"You don't think this fortune spoils our romance, dear, do you?" she asked, with painful wistfulness.

"No, it's not that."

"You love me just the same, and it's the same Cupid, though he wears sables now instead of rags?"

He kissed the hand on his shoulder.

"Yes, dear—oh, yes—forever the same. But there's something I must tell you. I have a secret, too."

"Is it something that will part us?" she whispered in terror.

"I don't think so." He stared at her helplessly, adding, humbly: "I'm rich, too."

"Rich?" she murmured, with indrawn breath.

"That's just what I said a few moments ago," and he laughed again, a little wildly. "Isn't it like something in a dream that couldn't be real?"

"How rich? What do you mean?" frowned Dolly, who had not laughed.

"I mean, I'm a rich young man, ma'am," he said, with mocking humility; "not as rich as you are—still, rich. I'll break the truth to you gently. I've a personal income of twenty-five thousand a year, and I'm afraid, Miss Smith, I'll have twice that much when my father dies."

At this Dolly drew back from him, and sat down dispiritedly at a distance.

"You're not even an artist," she said, blankly.

"Yes, I am, but I'm a rich one. I must admit, much against my will, that I never tried to sell a cartoon, have never felt like the homeless cat on the back fence I told you about."

"You certainly can tell falsehoods glibly," said Dolly, with a flash of her eyes.

Victor gave a short laugh of derision. "What about yourself, Miss Smith, Motherly Mazie? What about that nice, perfect little novelette you gave me of how, when your father, the music-teacher, died, you were flung upon a cruel world to earn your bread—and, incidentally, oysters, mushrooms, *et al.*? I say! *You* can't get in one at me there. Why, you even did the emotional business when you spoke of your cruel lot in a way to make Réjane die of envy could she have seen you."

Dolly treated this tirade with scornful silence.

"What's your name?" she demanded.

"You've probably heard it, though nobody buys me by the gross anywhere." He took a card from a pig-skin case and handed it to her very gravely. "Victor Annable, my dear Lady Dolly. Father is a bank president, and he even owns a big steam yacht. This is very unfortunate. I'm very sorry."

"It's odd we both kept our first names," murmured Dolly.

"I'm glad of that," said Victor; "that is, if this dismal situation admits of gladness at all. It would have been awkward if I had now to think of you as—say, Maria, and I don't

suppose you could ever get used to me as—Sam?"

Dolly's heart felt empty, except that a little of the old boredom was filtering into it. Victor, as by some fairy change, had become transformed before her eyes. His manner was different, his expression was not that of the buoyant young artist, laughing at possible starvation. In fact, her ideal had evolved into just such a young man as she might have met in London under the old conditions. Change the outward look of the place, dress Victor and herself fashionably, and there was now nothing to make their conversation different from what might have passed current between them in the secluded corner of a Bond-street tea-room.

"Why did you do this? Were you afraid, too, of being married for your money?" she asked, with a little imperious manner he had never seen before.

"No," said Victor, lounging back and unconsciously speaking with a drawl that, except for his American accent, was reminiscent to her of Piccadilly; "you were following adventure in the abstract, I in the concrete. You'll be surprised to learn that I did it because of you."

"But you didn't know me."

"Still—because of you. Will the story bore you?"

"Of course not," she snapped, while her heart sorrowed for that other Victor who had lectured her for buying his dinner.

"Well, it was this way. I was bored. All the family had gone, bag and baggage, to Europe. You know the big red-and-white house on the Square, with the daisies in the windows? That's my home. I saw you pass one day. I paint portraits. You first attracted me as a possible model. To put your wonderful, pale coloring on canvas and the something that is elfin and maddening in your face, was my first instinct. I saw you again. The interest deepened. I began to watch for you and the interest became gradually human, personal. I did not

intrude; you did not see me. I began to follow you. I saw you come in here half-a-dozen times before a daring idea came to me, that made me feel like a social Columbus—to become a worker like you, share the same sort of life, get to know you.”

Dolly began to feel a little happier. Matters were improving, since she unknowingly had been the instigation to his adventure. She moved her chair a little nearer. Victor's face, too, lost its listlessness. He looked at her very tenderly.

“We were to be like the happy vagabonds in ‘*La Vie de Bohème*,’” he went on; “I dreamed of Mürger's people as I arranged my plans and rented a room. That was seven months ago. We met, as you remember, in a controversy over the ownership of a bottle of milk, with Mrs. Schlitzner as umpire. It was sweet, adorable, refreshing. But I was different from you in one thing. You have not seen your world since you came here. I returned every day to mine. I used to have my breakfast at my club or at home almost every morning. The empty house and the butler asked no questions about the mysteriously shabby clothes I sometimes wore. Really, I seldom slept here.”

“You didn't even live the life sincerely while at it,” she said, the glow lifting from her heart again and leaving her cold. He was just a fashionable young man as he stood up before her, nodding dismally.

“Don't think you're the only one disappointed. Look at me,” he said, vigorously; “this smashes to smithereens one of my pet theories. I always meant to marry a poor girl. Rich men ought to, I think. I believed that somewhere a lovely young worker was being prepared for me by Fate. In you, I thought I saw my ideal little toiler.” He laughed, grimly. “In you—in Lady Dolly Lanesborough! Why, you're even a bigger fraud than I am. You haven't a pinch of artistic vagabondism to your

back. You're not only rich, but titled. You see my position? Here I am, bound to a rich and titled wife—I, who always wanted to play the Lord of Burleigh to a poor girl—with better results.”

The Lanesborough pride flowed over Dolly's face as she sprang up and faced him.

“Fortunately, Mr. Annable, the matter has not gone very far. Let us forget to-day. You can still marry your—toiler.” The word ended in a hard sob. She went to the divan and plumped her head into the pillows.

Victor stood dazed, then, much to his own surprise, found himself on his knees, kissing Lady Dolly Lanesborough's left ear passionately.

“Look at me, Dolly. I won't give you up. Why—good heavens, I love you.”

Something inarticulate came from the pillows.

“You love me, don't you?” asked Victor.

He thought the head nodded, “Yes.”

“Then what fools we are,” he murmured into the little ear. “As you said, dear, it's the same Cupid, though he's become both aristocratic and wealthy—and I'm the same, and you're the same——”

She turned her tear-wet face at this, and murmured like a sobbing child:

“*That's* what we must remember. *We're* the same—and the *love* was no pretense.” She sat up and wiped her eyes. “I've thought of a lovely thing,” she murmured; “let us always, always, pay the rent of your little room and mine for two real strugglers, Victor. Let us know that the people we played at being are really living, and perhaps loving—here. Shall we?”

“You're a brick to think of it,” he said, with his arms around her; “but I want never to see this room after you've left it. I'll tell you why—the Muse has whispered something to me, Dolly:

“Lacking Dolly's face,
It would be
Night eternally.”